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The story of Lundy's Lane.
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The Story of Lundy's Lane
By
John W. Godfrey

GIFT OF UNITED STATES
LOYALTY DEPARTMENT

THE STORY OF LUNDY'S LANE

By JOHN M. GODFREY

THE historian, delving among the old musty papers of our national archives, has unearthed the following letter from Sir Gordon Drummond, the Commander-in-Chief of the forces in Canada, to the Governor, Sir George Prevost:

"I am of opinion that the enemy's principal designs are intended against the frontier, a reoccupation of which will prove of such essential service to them, and of such incalculable injury to us, and that they will strain every nerve to effect so desirable an object; and I conceive their manoeuvres in the neighborhood of Plattsburg to be merely for the purpose of preventing our sending sufficient reinforcements for the security of their intended point of attack."

Sir George, whose oft-repeated incompetency had come near losing to Britain the northern half of the American continent, has written this note in pencil on the margin of the letter: "Very much obliged to General D. for his opinion; unfortunately for him it is not founded on fact, as not one soldier intended for U. C. has been prevented moving forward by the enemy's demonstration in the vicinity of Odeltown."

In the light of subsequent events, we will see which was right, the soldier or the administrator.

The first two years of the war of 1812 had ended propitiously for the heroic colonists. The Americans had been driven off the Niagara Peninsula. Not a foot of Canadian soil, with the exception of Amherstburg, was held by them; while, as a set-off to this, Fort Niagara was in the hands of the British. But the war clouds were gathering, and were again about to burst on that devoted Peninsula which had hitherto borne so much of the brunt of the fight. During the spring and early summer of 1814, General Brown mobilized an army of 6,000 men at Buffalo to renew the invasion of Upper Canada. It was these preparations

which caused Drummond to write the warning letter to the Governor. And it was the same spirit which moved Prevost to pencil his sarcastic thanks, that prevented his taking energetic measures to meet the invader. The only troops available to oppose Brown were a force of 1,500 regulars and a few militia, under the command of General Riall.

On the 3rd of July the threatened invasion commenced. General Brown threw a force across the river and seized Fort Erie, which was garrisoned by 170 men under Major Buck. He then marched north along the river to Street's Creek, near the village of Chippewa, where, on the following day, he encountered Riall, who resisted his advance. On the 5th of July was fought the bloody battle of Street's Creek, in which the British suffered such severe loss that Riall retreated on the 7th to Fort George, followed by Brown, who took post on Queens-
ton Heights to await the arrival of Admiral Chauncey from Sackett's Harbor, with the American fleet, before investing the forts at the mouth of the river. Riall having left part of his force in Fort George, retired to the high ground at Twenty Mile Creek, near where now stands the village of Jordan, his object being to block any movement of the Americans on Burlington Heights.

In the meantime Drummond was not inactive. He was at Kingston when the battle of Street's Creek was fought. As soon as he heard of this engagement, he issued a call to all the militia from the Bay of Quinte to Long Point. Right loyally did the patriotic farmer respond. The hay field and ripening harvest were deserted, the old Brown Bess was taken down from the walls of the log house. Good-byes were said to the wife and daughters of the home, and the father and grown-up sons marched away from the little clearing which their industry had made in the virgin forest, down to the front to swell the force of their country's defenders.

Much, indeed, do we owe to the yeoman veterans of 1812.

While all this preparation was going on, Brown remained at Queenston Heights, marking time. Letters were sent to Admiral Chauncey beseeching him to co-operate with his fleet in a movement on Burlington Heights. On the 23rd of July he received a letter from Chauncey, informing him that he was sick, and blockaded in Sackett's Harbor. The next day a reconnoitering party, consisting of 30 men, under the intrepid Captain FitzGibbon, approached to within a short distance of the American camp. They soon noticed that something unusual was going on. Tents were being struck, and to their amazement, they saw the enemy's entire force moving southerly along the Queenston road. FitzGibbon, venturing too near, was seen and pursued by the American cavalry as far as the British outposts. He, however, succeeded in eluding them, and carried to Riall the intelligence of Brown's retrograde movement.

Brown, having given up all hope of help from Chauncey, had fallen back on Street's Creek.

Riall at once ordered Colonel Pearson to march from Four Mile Creek and occupy the high ground at the junction of the Queenston Road and Lundy's Lane. Pearson marched that night with a force of 825 men. The only incident of the night march was the bringing in of an American soldier by two stout country women, who had disarmed him and taken him prisoner. Early the next morning Pearson was in position on Lundy's Lane, where he was shortly afterwards joined by General Riall. The remainder of Riall's force, consisting of 1,200 men under Colonel Hercules Scott, were left at De Cew's Falls, on the Twelve Mile Creek.

As the sun rises on the morning of the 25th of July, 1814, dispelling the darkness from the mighty river flowing swiftly to the great lake which stretches away to the northward like a sea of glass, the sentry pacing his watchful rounds at Fort George beholds a scene of surpassing beauty. To the south, Queenston Heights rises majestically. Be-

hind it is seen the misty cloud which hangs over the great cataract. The peaceful forest is scarcely moved by the morning breeze dying with the darkness. A warm delightful summer's day has begun. The sun is to go down on a wild scene of conflict and bloodshed. A schooner has just come to anchor in the river. A boat is launched, and an officer dressed in the rich uniform of a British general is rowed ashore. Soon the peaceful summer morn is changed to all the stormy bustle of war-like preparation. Orderlies hurry hither and thither; boats cross and recross the river, bearing officers and men. General Drummond has arrived to take personal control of the defence of Upper Canada. He has just learned of Brown's retreat and Riall's advance to Lundy's Lane.

Taking all the force available at the mouth of the river, he divided it into two columns. One column under Colonel Tucker, consisting of 500 men, was sent up the east bank. The other, under Drummond, marched up the Canadian side. Both were supported by a number of boats from the fleet filled with sailors. His object was to capture a small detachment of the enemy stationed at Lewiston. When Tucker arrived at Lewiston the enemy had decamped, leaving behind them, however, about a hundred tents and a considerable quantity of supplies. Tucker then crossed his men to Queenston and joined Drummond. After a short rest, Drummond, taking 800 men from the two detachments, started for Riall's position at Lundy's Lane.

We have seen the American army settled in camp at Chippewa, on the night of the 24th. The next day was to be devoted to rest. The morning passed quietly and uneventfully. Their position was the battlefield of Street's Creek. But a few short weeks had passed since, on this very spot, they had hurled back the fierce charge of the British regulars and the not less brave yeomen of Upper Canada. That little army had been forced by sheer weight of numbers to the very shores of Lake Ontario. General Brown had some right to think that this sultry July day would pass by without his being molested. But the restless energy of

Drummond had ordered it otherwise. About noon a dust-covered courier, with foam-flecked horse, dashed into camp with the astounding intelligence that Queenston Heights was held by a large force of British, and that another force had seized Lewiston. Brown at once came to the conclusion that the British were moving with the purpose of raiding his supplies at Fort Schlosser, a short distance south of the present American city of Niagara Falls. In order to prevent this he conceived the plan of advancing on Queenston, thinking by this to draw the British back to their own side of the river. About 2 o'clock some pickets came in with information that a considerable body of troops had been seen near the falls. He was convinced that this was merely a small reconnoitering party. To carry out his project he ordered General Winfield Scott about 4 o'clock to advance. Shortly after receiving the order this energetic commander had his troops on the way towards Queenston.

In those days there stood near Table Rock at the Falls a pleasant white tavern inhabited by an exceedingly judicious and tactful widow named Wilson. Although in the centre of hostilities, Widow Wilson had, by shrewd courtesy and certain unpatriotic suggestions, managed to escape the ravages which had befallen most of her neighbors. As the tide of war flowed backward and forward along the river, her house had been the resort of the officers of both armies. When Scott's vanguard came in sight of Wilson's tavern, a number of British officers were seen to come out of the house and hurriedly mount their horses and gallop off into the woods, with the exception of one elderly man, who halted in the middle of the road and coolly surveyed the enemy through his field glasses, until they were within short range, when, saluting a party of American officers riding in front, he turned and rode rapidly after the others.

When Scott came up, the widow bustled out with well-simulated enthusiasm, and told him that General Riall and his staff had just left, and that if he had only been a little earlier he might have made them all prisoners. She also informed him that 800 regulars and 300 militia, with some guns,

were in the woods near by. Scott ordered his men into the woods to disperse what he thought to be a mere handful of the British. What was his astonishment on coming into the clearing about half a mile from Lundy's Lane, to find Drummond rapidly forming his troops in battle line on the crest of the hill. Rather than risk the demoralizing effect of a retreat, he determined to offer battle, and dispatched a messenger for reinforcements.

But to return to Drummond. We left him marching towards Lundy's Lane after reuniting his two columns at Queenston. When about a mile from Riall's position he met Colonel Robinson retreating with the militia, and heard then of the enemy's advance. Robinson's command was turned back, and word was sent to Riall to stand fast on Lundy's Lane. When Drummond reached Riall the enemy were already within 600 yards of the position. You will remember that Hercules Scott, with 1,200 men, had been left at De Cew's Falls. Under orders from Riall he had marched at noon for Lundy's Lane, but when three miles from there he received orders to proceed to Queenston, Riall having decided not to resist the American advance. As soon as Drummond learned this, he despatched a messenger to him ordering him to return.

While the messenger is galloping down the Queenston road to bring up the much-needed reinforcements, while Winfield Scott is forming his line for the advance, and Drummond is making his dispositions to meet the attack, let us view for a little the scene of this historic struggle.

A ride of two miles in a horse car from the Canadian town of Niagara Falls brings us to the little village of Drummondville. The main street of the village is the old Queenston road. Another road branches off this street and runs west over a hill. This is Lundy's Lane. It is a leading highway running west for about twelve miles to De Cew's Falls. On the brow of the hill a graveyard extends to both sides of the road. On the south side stands a brick church. An observatory has been erected on the north side, from which a splendid view can be obtained of the surrounding country.

Brock's Monument stands out prominently to the north. That is the Lundy's Lane of to-day. Drop the curtain and let the scene shift on the stage of history's drama. Change the scene back to that summer day in 1814. When the curtain is rolled up we find that the little village of Drummondville has been blotted out. The broad road still runs over the hill, with a clearing on both sides. For the modern house of worship we find substituted a small, red frame church.

There is still the little graveyard. But the dead have no stone and marble to tell where they lie. No lofty monument rears its pinnacle, a nation's honor mark for those dead heroes who that night were living men full of strength and vigor. A few wooden slabs, some nameless, some rudely carved by the blacksmith of the settlement, alone mark it as a last resting-place. The slope of the hill on the south is covered with a young orchard. To the east of the Queenston road is a cleared space, and from the edge of that cleared space to the river the ground is covered with bushes and trees.

The brow of the hill was the centre of Drummond's position. Two twenty-four pounders were placed near the church, supported by the 89th Royal Scots and the 41st Light Infantry. From the centre the British line ran in the form of a crescent, with the Glengarry Regiment on the right, and on the left, extending to the east of the Queenston road, the 8th and the incorporated militia. One company of the 19th Light Dragoons were stationed on the road a little north of Lundy's Lane. In all, 1,637 men stood in line to meet the American attack. At the beginning the enemy had a force of 2,000 men.

Scott began his attack about half an hour before dusk. The main assault was made on the British centre and left. Shortly after the battle commenced, Scott noticed a blank space, covered with trees and bushes, to the east of the British left flank. He ordered Colonel Jessup, with one battalion, to creep up through the bushes and turn the left flank. The militia were surprised and driven back across the Queenston road to the rear of the centre. In the confusion that

followed, about 100 prisoners were captured, including General Riall and Captain Loring, one of General Drummond's aides-de-camp. General Riall had been wounded during the attack on the centre, and was proceeding to the rear, accompanied by Captain Loring, who had been sent to bring up the dragoons. The Captain, mistaking in the dark a number of the enemy for our own soldiers, called out, "Make room there, men, for General Riall." An American officer replied, "Aye, aye, sir," and directed his men to seize the bridles of their horses and make them prisoners. The enemy received the news of Riall's capture with a loud cheer, but hardly had it died away when a well-directed shot struck one of the American ammunition waggons and blew it up with a loud explosion. An answering cheer rang out from the crest of the hill at this success.

In the meantime the militia had rallied and formed up behind the 89th, facing the Queenston road. Volley after volley was poured into Jessup's force, until they finally turned tail and retreated into the bush, and communication was again established with the British rear.

On the right the Glengarrys easily held their own. At the beginning of the fight an unfortunate mistake took place. The Glengarry's were retiring to their position before the American advance, when the 89th, thinking they were the enemy, fired a volley into them. Probably little injury resulted, however, as they had only 4 killed and 31 wounded in the entire engagement.

It was on the centre that the most furious onslaught was made. Scott's object was to capture the guns and cut the British force in two. With dauntless bravery the enemy hurled themselves on the battery, but every charge was received with a leaden shower that crumpled up their lines and drove them back, leaving the slope of the hill strewn with their dead and wounded. Darkness had fallen, but the conflict went on more fiercely than ever. Scott determinedly drove his human wedge into the British centre, but it was just as determinedly pushed back. There was no breeze to disperse the smoke, and soon the whole field was enveloped in a dense cloud which added to the weird, in-

describable confusion of the scene. In the meantime, General Brown had arrived with the brigades of Ripley and Porter. As soon as he saw the situation, he decided to withdraw Scott's brigade and form them into a reserve, and again try to take the British battery with the fresh troops. His plan was to assault the British centre and right. Two regiments, the 1st and 23rd, were to cover the advance with their fire. The 21st, under Colonel Miller, were to charge the guns, while Porter's brigade engaged the right. While this change was taking place, there was a lull in the fight. Drummond knew that this was the calm before the storm, and anxiously looked for his Blucher, Hercules Scott. The messenger sent to recall him had found him after he had proceeded three miles towards Queenston. Although they had already marched fifteen miles through the scorching heat, they cheerfully turned back. Soon the booming of cannon and the heavy volleying of musketry told them that a general engagement had begun, and urged them onward to the assistance of Drummond's little army. They deployed onto the battlefield from the right, just before the fresh attack was made, and were formed as a second line behind the guns.

The battle was renewed with a tremendous fusillade of musketry and a heavy cannonade of artillery from both sides. Under cover of the fire from his supports, Miller advanced with his regiment through the orchard up the slope. The first few rounds entirely disorganized the 1st and 23rd, and they broke and fled in confusion. Miller, however, continued his advance up the hill, and unnoticed by the British until he reached the rail fence of the graveyard, within a few feet of the guns. There stood the gunners with lighted fusees, ignorant of the certain death that awaited them. Three hundred rifles were levelled against them, ready to belch forth the summons to eternity. Suddenly out of the dark there crashed a terrific volley. With a wild cheer the Americans charged. The few gunners who survived that awful hurricane of lead were bayoneted or made prisoners. The troops supporting the artillery fell back upon their second line.

The enemy had captured the guns and the key of the position.

The fighting that now ensued has few parallels in the history of war. The confusion following the taking of the guns was only momentary. Drummond rallied his men and made a vigorous charge to retake the guns. But the heavy fire of the Americans, who in addition to bullets, charged their muskets with buck shot, drove them back to the other side of the hill. The 103rd, being ordered forward, marched in the darkness directly into the centre of the enemy's new position, and were first made aware of their mistake by a crashing volley which threw them into confusion. In the meantime the American artillery were advanced to support the infantry. While one of their Howitzers was coming up the hill at a gallop, a sudden volley killed or wounded nearly all the drivers, and the horses, missing their riders, plunged frantically forward into the opposing ranks, where they were soon secured. For two hours it was a fierce hand-to-hand fight. For two hours brave Saxon faced brave Saxon, neither giving way. The remainder of the British artillery was brought forward, until the muzzles of the guns were only a few yards apart. Vainly the Americans tried to force the British from the hill. Vainly the British tried to regain their lost guns. There they stood, only twenty yards separating them. Drummond, ever in the thick of the fight, with the blood streaming from a severe wound in the neck, shouts, "Stick to them, my fine fellows." The answer comes back in stentorian tones from an American officer, "Level low and fire at their flashes." Who can describe that awful struggle in the little graveyard on the hill? What a place for carnage, that small plot of ground dedicated to the peaceful repose of those pioneers of the Niagara; that primitive church where the rugged settlers gathered to hear the message of peace, now turned into a hell of maddened passion by the wanton ambition of demagogues. A moonless night, the black smoke hanging like a pall, the roaring cannon, the crackling musketry, the lurid flashes, the clashing of steel, the hoarse cries, the pitiable groanings of the wounded, all this has chanced upon

God's acre—the spot dedicated to love and brotherhood. Thirst, always the agony of the wounded, has thickened the tongues and dried the throats of the unwounded. Human endurance has reached near to the breaking point. The fearful strain cannot last much longer. Drummond knows this. He must either drive the enemy off the hill or be driven off himself. He rallies his shattered troops for a supreme effort. With a loud cheer they charge. Brown and Scott have both retired from the field wounded, and Ripley, upon whom the command devolved, sees that it is impossible to successfully continue the combat. With their last efforts they hold back the British until they have limbered up their own guns and got them off the hill, in the confusion taking one of the British 6 pounders and leaving one of their own guns in its place. The last remnant of the American army is driven off the hill, and the captured guns are retaken. All night, that army which had marched out but a few hours before to fight and conquer the British army wherever they found it, now defeated and disorganized, straggles into the camp at Street's Creek. The invasion of Upper Canada has ended.

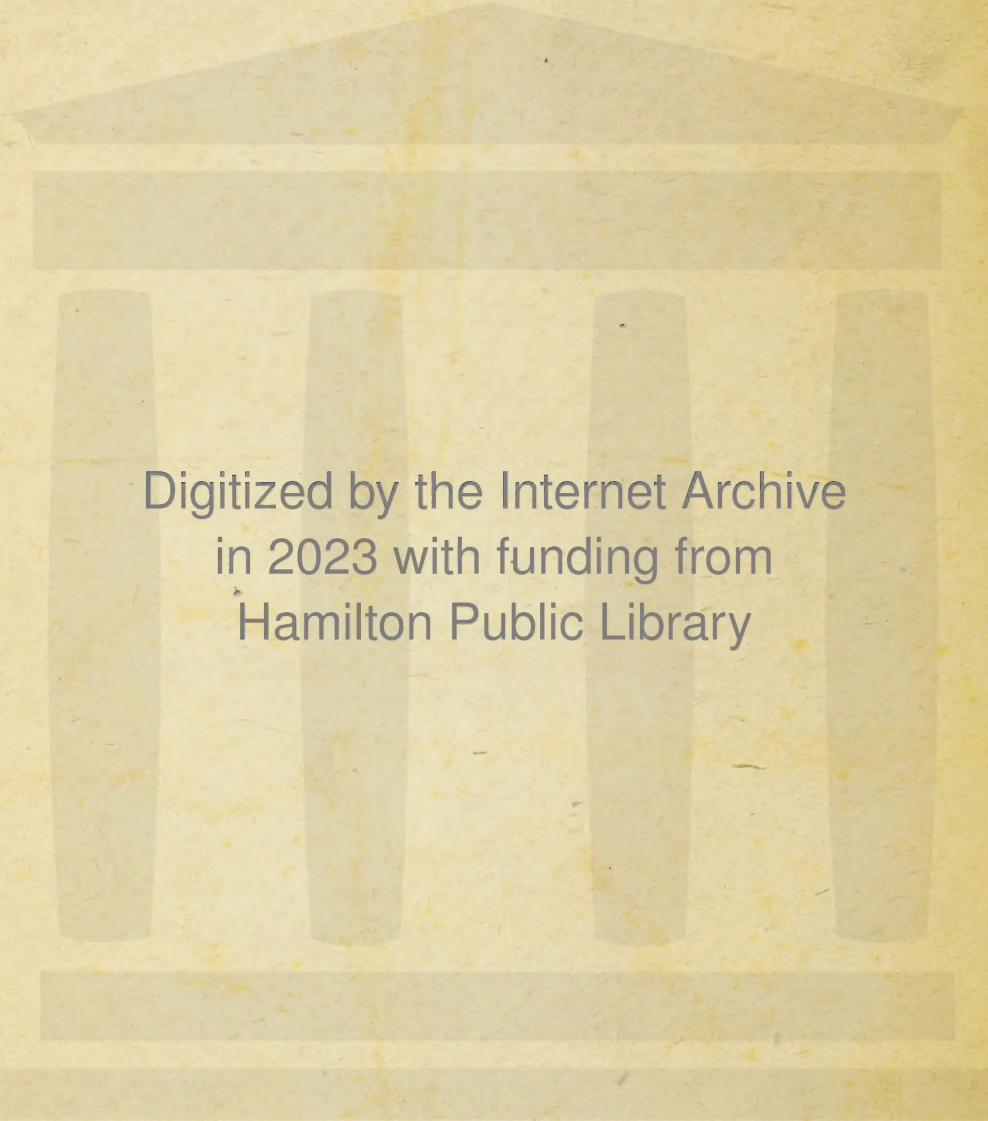
In Canada we call this fight the Battle of Lundy's Lane. From the fact that Drummond headed the report of the engagement "Near Niagara Falls," it is officially known in the British War Office as the Battle of Niagara. By the Americans it is called the Battle of Bridgewater, named from the

Bridgewater Mills about a mile from the battlefield. The official loss of the British is given at 878; that of the Americans, 852. The status of the various regiments engaged show that the total British force was 2,837 of all ranks. The number of the enemy is not positively known. Lossing, the American historian, puts it as low as 2,600; British historians as high as 5,000. A contemporary American writer, describing the battle, says that the British had 5,000 men and the Americans 4,000 men. While this is of no consequence in estimating the number of Drummond's command, it is an important admission as to the number of Americans engaged.

The next morning General Ripley again crossed the Chippewa, as he stated, for the purpose of burying his dead and bringing away the wounded. He advanced to within a mile of the battlefield, but finding Drummond still in possession of Lundy's Lane, he returned to his camp, and, after destroying and throwing into the rapids a large quantity of his stores, beat a hasty retreat to Fort Erie.

This is the story of Lundy's Lane, a gallant page of Canadian history written in letters of blood. A grateful country has erected a monument to the dead heroes in the little graveyard on the hill, where they bravely stemmed back the tide of hostile invasion. But a better monument are the British institutions which they so well maintained for us on that July night in 1814.





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